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# Bush, Ferraro spar on taxes, foreign policy

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WASHINGTON — Vice President Bush and Representative Geraldine A. Ferraro flared at each other last night as they defended their running mates in an 85-minute debate that covered issues across the range of foreign and domestic policy.

Their historic confrontation was the first national election debate in which a woman has taken part, and Ms. Ferraro exchanged charges and countercharges with the more experienced vice president on questions ranging from Lebanon, El Salvador and arms control to abortion, religion and the two candidates' own tax problems.

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Repeatedly, Mr. Bush mentioned his experience as CIA director, ambassador to China and in other positions to draw a contrast with Ms. Ferraro's briefer public career.

As the debate turned to foreign policy, the questioning focused quickly on the loss of American lives in three terrorist bombings in Beirut within 17 months. Who was responsible?

Mr. Bush said he didn't think "you can go assigning blame." Citing the difficulty of combatting international terrorism, he said a steady campaign for improved security must continue. The solution, he declared, rests ultimately in solving deeper problems, such as the fate of Palestinians, that inspire terrorism.

Without directly accusing the president of responsibility for the losses to terrorism, Ms. Ferraro nonetheless recalled each of the three fatal episodes, citing security failures in each case. "Are we going to take proper precautions?" she demanded. "... Is this president going

to take some action?"

The two candidates differed over the proper use of covert activity to support friendly forces abroad, specifically in Central America. Ms. Ferraro said she supported with an intelligence-gathering role for the Central Intelligence Agency. But she did not endorse, she declared, support for "a covert war" in Central America or "trying to overthrow governments."

Mr. Bush went on the attack. Ms. Ferraro, he claimed, proposed to do away with covert action, and that "is serious business." He offered to "help" her by explaining the difference between the situation of the American hostages in Iran and the bombing in Beirut and ended by accusing her of suggesting that the U.S. marines who were killed in Lebanon "died in shame."

Ms. Ferraro responded with one of the few flashes of anger shown during the debate. "I almost resent your patronizing attitude," she retorted, "... that you have to teach me about foreign policy." She had seen what happened in Lebanon, she said, and no one had suggested the marines died in shame. "No parent would ever say that."

Her opposition to covert action, she said, applied to the one circumstance under debate, the situation in Nicaragua. Otherwise, she left the door open to covert action — and to the use of force generally — if necessary to the national defense or to fulfill commitments to friends and allies.

The administration appears "befuddled," she said, now that the leftist government of Nicaragua and the U.S.-supported government of El Salvador are both making conciliatory gestures. The United States should "work with" Nicaragua to "achieve a pluralistic society," she argued, but she was "not willing to live with a force that could be a danger to our country."

Mr. Bush briskly defended American policy in the region, including U.S. support for anti-government guerrillas in Nicaragua. The difference between leftist controls in Nicaragua and democratic reforms in El Salvador, he said, "is the difference between night and day." He personally had told Salvadoran leaders that they had to make reforms, he said, "and they did."

Ms. Ferraro and Mr. Bush argued at length over responsibility for the absence of arms control agreements and Soviet-American exchanges during the Reagan administration. Mr. Bush said the Soviets had walked out in the face of many reasonable U.S. proposals.

Citing the recent visit of Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko to Washington, he said Moscow would negotiate seriously if it knew a firm President — Mr. Reagan — would be in the White House. One impediment to serious discussions, he argued, was that the Soviets had changed leaders three times during Mr. Reagan's term.

But Ms. Ferraro argued that administration proposals had not been forthcoming. Mr. Mondale, she reminded the audience, has endorsed regular U.S.-Soviet exchanges and early initiatives for a "mutual, verifiable" freeze on nuclear weaponry. At one point she appeared unsure to what precisely a freeze would apply.

But while she advocated negotiations, she said she would deal firmly with the Soviets as necessary. If they should attack, she declared, they would be met with "swift, concise and certain retaliation."

The administration's central claim in foreign policy, Mr. Bush said, was that it had restored American strength. He passed up a chance to ask a summary question to Ms. Ferraro, explaining that differences between the two presidential tickets were so great that "the American people will have a clear choice."

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**EXCERPTED**